

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
H-232, The Capitol
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
H-107, The Capitol
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Clyburn
H-329, The Capitol
Washington DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer, and Whip Clyburn:

As members from Western states, we write to request swift floor action on our wildfire legislation. We need a comprehensive approach to address air quality, improve firefighter pay and equipment, invest in wildfire science, and advance land management techniques to respond to the growing threat of wildfires.

We appreciate your work to include \$1.36 billion for wildland fire management in the Fiscal Year 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law No: 117-103) and \$3.4 billion for the same purpose in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. We also appreciate that the House has already acted on disaster assistance for our agriculture community, increased the federal cost share for federally declared disasters and emergencies in 2020 and 2021, and advanced tax legislation that incentivizes disaster resiliency work. As you know, wildfires are growing in their scale, frequency, and destruction. A recent United Nations report¹ found that globally, we will see a 14% increase in wildfires by 2030 and a 30% increase by 2050.

In Colorado, four of the largest wildfires happened in the last 18 months. On December 30th, a rangeland fire, fueled by hurricane-force winds, ran through the suburban neighborhoods of Louisville and Superior, Colorado, forcing over 30,000 to evacuate and destroying 1,084 homes and businesses in less than 18 hours. Cameron Peak Fire in Larimer County, Colorado burned over 400,000 acres from August 2020 through December 2020. The East Troublesome Fire in Grand County grew more than 100,000 acres in one day. Collectively they have destroyed countless structures and left millions in damages for our communities to take on. Most recently, Boulder residents were evacuated as the NCAR Fire burned as close as 1,000 yards from homes in the area.

In California, wildfires burned over 3 million acres last year alone – the second highest total for acres burned by wildfires annually following 4.3 million acres in 2020. The cycle of extreme heat and drought in the state have increased extreme wildfire conditions, making high-cost, high-loss events much more commonplace. For example, one large study estimates the direct and indirect costs of the 2018 Camp Fire that claimed 85 lives to be upwards of \$422 billion. Over 2 million properties in the state are now located in high fire risk areas and fire suppression capabilities have already been exceeded.

Oregon's 2021 fire season destroyed the second most acreage (828,400 acres) of any state in the country. Southern Oregon's Bootleg Fire was the state's largest fire last year, and for a time, the largest

¹ <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/spreading-wildfire-rising-threat-extraordinary-landscape-fires>

fire in the country. It caused thousands of families to evacuate their homes, burned hundreds of homes and outbuildings, and even temporarily created its own weather. Despite the severity of last year's fire season, 2020's fire season was even more damaging. In 2020, wildfires in Oregon torched more than 1.1 million acres, destroyed thousands of homes, and caused hundreds of millions of dollars in lost economic output and damages.

Congress needs to do more. My colleagues and I have proposed some solutions:

- Rep. Neguse has introduced **H.R. 1066, the Wildfire Recovery Act**, alongside Rep. John Curtis. This legislation would increase federal support available to communities in the aftermath of a wildfire—specifically allowing for an increase in the federal cost share for the Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) program. This bill passed on a bipartisan basis out of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and we are eager for the bill to come to a vote in the full House of Representatives.
- Reps. Lofgren, McNerney, Perlmutter, and Bonamici introduced **H.R. 5781, the National Wildland Fire Risk Reduction Program Act**, which would establish a whole of government approach to wildfires by identifying and investing in research and development, setting up warning and forecast systems, developing observation and sensing technologies, and standardizing data collection efforts to improve the nation's preparedness, resilience, and response to wildfires. This bill incorporates bipartisan amendments and was voice voted out of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee.
- Rep. Panetta introduced **H.R. 3534, the Wildfire Emergency Act**, which would authorize \$250 million to fund a new U.S. Forest Service program to conduct large-scale forest restoration projects. Specifically, it would authorize \$100 million for a new grant program to protect critical infrastructure and allow for greater energy flexibility. Additionally, the bill establishes one or more Prescribed Fire Centers, develops a career-training pipeline for forestry and fire management workers, and provides an additional \$50 million to help disadvantaged communities plan forest restoration.
- Along with Representatives Cheney and Porter, Rep. Neguse introduced **H.R. 5631, the Tim Hart Wildland Fire Classification and Pay Parity Act**, comprehensive legislation to overhaul federal firefighter pay, benefits and classification. Every major wildfire in our country relies on federal wildland firefighters and the vital services their specialized crews provide to protect life and property. Tim's Act will bring wages and benefits closer to parity with other firefighting agencies and will provide resources to support the unique mental, emotional, and physical challenges faced from increased wildfire intensity, duration, and frequency. The bill is named after Tim Hart, a smokejumper from Cody, Wyoming who lost his life on May 24, 2021 while working on the Eicks Fire in New Mexico.
- Reps. Lofgren, Thompson (Mike), Huffman, Peters, Panetta, Neguse, and Porter introduced **H.R. 4274, the Wildland Firefighter Fair Pay Act**, which would permanently waive the pay cap for federal wildland firefighters who often go uncompensated for overtime once they hit the cap on premium pay. It also directs the land management agencies to, in collaboration with the Office of Personnel Management, create a separate classification for the federal firefighting workforce.
- Rep. Panetta also introduced **H.R. 5341, the Save Our Forests Act**, to address chronic staffing shortages in National Forests and improve risk mitigation and response to wildfires. This bill would direct the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service to fill vacancies in National Forests for recreation and management planning staff, authorizes funding to fill positions, and prioritizes filling vacancies in National Forests facing a high risk of wildfires.
- Reps. Lofgren, Thompson, Huffman, and Panetta introduced **H.R. 5780, the Disaster Equity and Fairness Act**, which would ensure that FEMA's disaster preparedness and response efforts

fully address the unique needs of underserved communities, the emergency food and water needs following a disaster, and the impact of consecutive disasters on communities.

- Rep. Neguse introduced **H.R. 6336, the Western Wildfire Support Act**, which would support wildfire prevention, suppression, and recovery efforts. The bill directs the creation of fire management plans for federal land and funding to increase mitigation activities prior to a disaster; establishes a grant program to help with the acquisition of state-of-the-art firefighting equipment; and provides additional funding to support communities in recovery.
- Reps. Lofgren, Thompson, Huffman, and Panetta introduced **H.R. 5782, the FEMA Improvement, Reform, and Efficiency (FIRE) Act**, which would make several changes to the Stafford Act to ensure that FEMA's disaster preparedness and response efforts fully address the unique nature of wildfires and their impacts on communities. This includes directing FEMA to pre-deploy assets during times of highest risk, red flag warnings, improving relocation assistance for public infrastructure affected by fires, ensuring equity of assistance to tribal communities and governments, and examining ways to speed up the assistance process.

Thank you for your ongoing support for wildfire mitigation and recovery efforts. We look forward to working with you to bring our wildfire legislation to the floor. Our communities are burning, and we cannot wait any longer.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress